

Goalie parent do's and don'ts

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Have you ever noticed how often goalie parents wander off to the far end of the rink during games to watch by themselves? It's no surprise. How hard it is to watch your child getting barraged by flying objects while trying to hold down the last line of defense under the pressure of being the one who can be the greatest cause of either their team's success or their failure. Not fun, right?

As goalie coaches, we are experts on teaching skills, concepts and attitudes to our students. We know that it's the attitude and mindset of the goalie that make the biggest difference. Goalie parents have a much bigger impact, whether positive or negative, on how these attitudes develop at a young age. And after years of helping both goalies and their parents, we believe we can offer some valuable advice to all of them.

Don't: Make excuses for your goalie about losses or goals against when the team plays poorly in front of them. Even if there's some truth in it, blaming others produces mental weakness, not mental toughness.

Do: Offer encouragement after a loss, and gently encourage the type of introspection that leads to improvement and motivation. Avoid talking about matters that are beyond their control.

Don't: Get in the car with them and talk about every goal scored against them, even if it's in the name of "learning from mistakes."

Do: Talk about saves and mention some of the little things they did to help the team.

Don't: Pay too much attention to stats. It's probably best if you and the goalie never even know their save percentage or goals-against average.

Do: Pay lots of attention to your child's growth as a teammate and competitor.

Don't: Compare them to other goalies, ranking them better or worse.

Do: Compare them to their former selves, highlighting how far they've come.

Don't: Make too a big a deal about shutouts.

Do: Encourage them to try to keep the game close and give their team a chance to win.

Don't: Sit right by the glass, try to coach from the bleachers or use hand signals to them during games.

Do: Keep a low profile at the game and try to enjoy watching it. You want them to get lost in the moment and have fun playing. That's how goalies "get in the zone" and it happens more when they're not worried about what mom and dad are thinking.

Don't: Get caught up in trying to make your child be the best by pushing them, over-coaching them and signing them up for every possible program.

Do: Allow your child to improve at their own rate and to play the game because it's fun.

Don't: Badmouth the other players or coaches in any way, even after a bad game.

Do: Say positive things about teammates and coaches, even if it's hard to think of something.

Don't: Reward them for individual achievements on the field.

Do: Praise them for being resilient and dealing with adversity.

These may seem like common sense, but we all get a little crazy when it comes to our kids. The emotions can cloud our judgement. Being a hockey parent can multiply that craziness, which means that being a goalie parent can make it even worse.

Being a goalie parent can bring out the worst in us. All of our character flaws magnified right there in front of the children that learn from our behaviors and attitudes. Since a positive attitude and sound mindset are paramount to a goalie's performance, parents need to work hard to nurture their own positive attitudes.

There is a silver lining in all of this. It's something that goalie parents set their sights on to make it all worth the while. Youth sport is a journey, and goaltending is a treacherous one. The challenges along the way make it hard to achieve NHL stardom. Although your child probably won't get a scholarship, there is something much more valuable they will achieve in ways beyond that of athletes who chose an easier path; growth of character. It doesn't take talent or thousands of dollars in training either. It takes a positive attitude and some inspiration

from the people they love. Goalies parents can take a sigh of relief, let go of all the negative pressure and get back to doing what they do best – love their children.

As Coaching Director at Stauber's Goalcrease since 2002, Jeff Hall has led the skill development of thousands of goalies from Mites to Pros, and everything in between. Goalcrease Training and Equipment Center in Edina has a real ice rink and full service goalie staff.

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